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Reformed Faith and Near East

by B. M. MADANY*

As the year 1956 begins, e eyes of the world are focused the lands of the Near East. The hos- ity between the Arab States and Is- el has reached a dangerous point, and e Communist bloc has achieved a markable victory in isolating certain ab states from the West.

The purpose of this article is to ac- aint the readers of *The Reformed urnal* with the history of the Prot- ant missions in this area and with e challenge of the present-day situa- n.

* * *

The Protestant faith was ought to Syria during the first half the 19th century. Missionaries of e ABCFM came to Beirut (now the pital of Lebanon) late in the '20's d started immediately to master Ara- c and to preach the Gospel. Three ndred years earlier, the Ottoman rks had conquered the Near East and unged it into a Dark Age. As those rks were strict and orthodox Mus- ns, they persecuted fanatically the hall and weak Christian minorities. ese had been living under Islam since e 7th century, when the Arab armies Mohammed's Khalifs (successors) vaded their lands and converted most them to Islam by the sword.

The American missionaries tried to form the existing Eastern churches. istorically, these churches were either reek Orthodox or Roman Catholic or eretical (i.e. condemned by the early cumenical Councils for their christo- logical errors). Their clergy were mostly ignorant and poor. At first they welcomed the missionaries. Soon, however, the hierarchy opposed them bitterly and condemned them as heretics.

The missionaries continued, under persecution, to preach the Gospel. Several people from those Eastern churches renounced their dead and sacerdotal Christianity and embraced the Evangelical faith. They organized a national Evangelical Church some twenty years after the arrival of the first missionary. The Syrian Evangelical Church was officially Reformed, as much as were the constituent members of the ABCFM (i.e., the Congregationalists, Dutch Reformed and New School Presbyterians).

Several methods were used for the preaching of the Gospel. People listened to them as they expounded the Word of God and showed them with love, the errors of the old churches. Thus were the first adult converts won.

As Syria had very few schools, the majority of the people were illiterate and ignorant of the classical Arabic. Missionaries opened various schools for the education of Syrian boys and girls. None was excluded from admittance as long as he studied the whole curriculum. Of course, Muslim and Eastern Christian leaders did their best to frustrate the missionaries in their zeal to win converts from their students, but many parents were pleased to have the opportunity to educate their children — even though they did not want the Protestant faith.

Seminaries for young men and women were opened to train the first leaders of the National Protestant Church. A college was also established in Beirut (1869) for the training of medical workers and the preparation of leaders for the communities of the Near East.

Their best and permanent achievement was the translation of the Bible into Arabic — the language of all the countries between Morocco and Persia and the holy tongue of Islam. Other important literary achievements were numerous tracts on the necessity of reforms within the church. Some standard works like A. A. Hodge's *Outlines Of Theology*, D'Aubigne's *History Of The Reformation*, and the Westminster standards were also translated. A commentary in Arabic on the whole Bible

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Reformed Faith and the Near East — Continued

was started but never completely finished.

The sun of the Reformation continued to rise with the years of the 19th century, and as the 20th was ushered in, it stood high in the blue Syrian sky. Yet the glorious work of the pioneer missionaries was not to receive its recompense in the building up of a strong and influential national church. There were two main reasons: 1. Immigration to the United States and the British Empire, Christians especially. Protestants sought freedom of conscience and economic prosperity in Western lands. To reach America was the ideal of many a youth who graduated from mission schools. (And still is today).

2. The triumph of modernism in the home churches of the missionaries is the weightiest cause for the eclipse of the faith in the Near East. It is generally conceded now that foreign missions, especially in the case of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., were the attraction for several extreme modernists who used the educational institutions for the dissemination of the Social Gospel and a vague synergistic world faith! The good and true word sown by the faithful pioneers has almost been completely undone by their unfaithful successors.

* * *

WHEN the Near Eastern countries achieved their independence, partially in 1918 and completely in 1946, there was no healthy and truly Reformed church. A good part of the converts had immigrated, and the rest still depended largely on foreign missionaries who had changed the heart of their teaching. The congregations of the Evangelical Church became static. They won very few converts and could not replace the old leadership because of the blight of modernism and its deadly influence on the Protestant youth.

To give a picture of these churches is hard and painful. There is hardly any zeal for the winning of traditional Christians or Muslims to Christ. The systematic inculcation of truth through the use of the Shorter Catechism has almost disappeared. Preaching has degenerated into moralizing, and prominent ministers are more interested in the World Council of Churches than in the spiritual welfare of their congregations or the evangelization of the Christless masses.

Education has come under the direct control of the various governments and mission schools have gradually had to comply with government regulations as to the nature of the curriculum, textbooks and Bible teaching. The schools and colleges of the Presbyterians are becoming the most powerful agents in the secularization of the Near East. The original Syrian Protestant College, now under the name of the American University of Beirut has sent out leaders into the neighboring countries, imbued with a secular (anti-Christian) philosophy. The other schools — still under the control of the missionaries — have replaced Bible study with books on the Bible which teach the children the evolutionary theory of Israel's religion, the Higher Critical theory of Prophetism and of Christ!

Meanwhile, the whole intellectual world has undergone tremendous changes. With the introduction of the secular French education which idealized the French revolution of 1789, a ripe atmosphere for socialism and communism has been created. Many of the intellectuals, university students, and even secondary school pupils, are committed to definite social and economical theories which favor some type of Pan-Arab socialism. Communists are very active in student circles, normal schools and the army. Islam has still a strong hold on the masses, though the rising generation is getting farther and farther from its theistic affirmations.

No picture of the present-day situation will be accurate without a word on the Zionist state of Israel. Founded by force and under the blessing of the West and Russia, this state is responsible for most of the political chaos that reigns now within the N. E. Far from solving the Jewish refugee problem, it has created a worse one in the expulsion of the majority of Palestine Arab inhabitants (both Christian and Moslem) and the gathering in of a small fraction of World Jewry. To the Arabs, Israel is a bitter foe who owes her existence to the American dollar. Thus Americans are regarded with suspicion and contempt. This feeling is strengthened by calculated systematic Russian propaganda.

* * *

WHAT about the future? What should be our attitude as Reformed Christians in the West? Should we give up the whole area as lost? I am sure that our strong faith in the sovereignty of God does not warrant any such attitude.

By the grace of God the door is still partially open for the preaching of the Gospel. We should bear the following considerations in mind as we think about the challenge of re-planting the Reformed faith in the heart of the Near East.

There is no clear-cut method for the introduction of the Reformed faith. We must take into full account the complex situation in the field, of ideas and systems of thought. On the Near East field we have Islam trying to adapt itself to this modern world and hesitating between strict orthodoxy and liberalism; Zionism struggling to survive in a hostile and turbulent environment; Roman Catholicism endeavoring to keep the R. C.'s faithful to its dogmas and to bring them nearer to the Vatican; Greek Orthodoxy bankrupt and confused and becoming an ally of Russian imperialism; and lastly, Protestantism hardly surviving, submerged in the era of modernism and cults.

Recognizing the dangers of institutionalism — even among the smaller missions which remained theoretically conservative — we should endeavor to preach the Gospel directly in the New Testament way.

As an initial step, we could investi-

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te the possibility of broadcasting the ıristian faith over a commercial Eupean station such as Luxemburg ussia and China have powerful staıns reaching millions of Arabs with ir Marxist gospel). This broadcast es not have to follow the pattern of nerican religious broadcasts (such worship services on Sabbath days) t may be done in such a way as to ıke clear the nature of the Gosl. A special stress could be put the cultural implications of the ıristian faith so as to dispel the ong idea existing in Islam that Chrisnity is merely a matter of private d public worship of the Triune God. Another important way to supplent the radio ministry would be the blication of standard Reformed books ch as Berkhof's "*Systematic Theoly*," Kuyper's lectures on Calvinism d Machen's "The Christian View of an." A Reformed periodical in Arabic dealing with the Bible, Theology, Church History and practical problems that face the Christian in the N. E., would be very helpful.

As to the organization of a Reformed Church in the Near East, this matter would be left in the will of God. I do not mean that this should not be our aim, but we should not be too quick to act before ideas have borne their fruit and this might take considerable time. It is my sure conviction that if the Reformed faith is preached in the New Testament way and without the drawbacks inherent in the conventional missionary way, we would see one day a youthful and indigenous Reformed Church witnessing for the historic Christian faith in the heart of the Moslem world. Furthermore, the political situation at present does not allow any establishment of a mission in the Near East with the exception of Lebanon.

In the thirteenth chapter of Acts we read of the commissioning and sending of Barnabas and Paul to evangelize the heathen world. In verse 4: "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed into Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."

It is common knowledge that the West owes its Christianity to the missionary zeal of that Syrian Church of Antioch. There might have been numerous considerations which did not favor the sending of those gifted teachers and apostles, but being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Church of Christ in Antioch launched the missionary enterprise which shall not cease till the end of time. As a Syrian Christian who saw the world's light in Seleucia and who found peace and truth in the God of Calvinism, I appeal for the help and prayers of all who love and cherish the Reformed faith.

)ur Penitence Problem

by WM. P. BRINK*

*I*N JUNE of this year the Chrisn Reformed Church will face one of most difficult problems. Our Syns have repeatedly dealt with this oblem in one aspect or another, and ve designated it as the Divorce and marriage Problem.

In reality we have no divorce and marriage problem in the Christian Rermed Church. Such a designation is misnomer. There has never been any al debate about either divorce or rrriage. We can say with confidence it everyone in the Christian Reformed urch is opposed to the divorce evil society. The church has been united the conviction that the Lord has forlden divorce and remarriage except the case of fornication.

The real problem which has troubled e Christian Reformed Church is not vorce and remarriage but rather it the question of how to deal with a rtain class of penitents. In our urches and mission stations converts e being brought to the Lord. Many these have in their past obtained dirces on grounds other than adultery. ıey have now remarried. As the ilippian jailor asked Paul, these peo- are asking the Christian Reformed urch to show them the way of salvation. In all propriety they are being told to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is at this point that we face our problem: How must these people repent? On this subject our church has been troubled and has been seeking a Scriptural answer. This is then our real problem — a penitence problem.

In dealing with our penitence problem we must remember that we are not merely dealing with an abstract philosophical or theological problem, but with real people and their problems. I recall a definite case in my ministry. It was not an unusual case, perhaps. Many others must have had similar cases. A woman had been brought to the Lord in one of our churches. We shall call her Mrs. Convert. She had been catechized and was eager to profess her faith and become a member of the Christian Reformed Church. At this time we asked her whether she had ever been married before. She confessed that she had. As a girl of seventeen she had been married for two months and then divorced on grounds of cruelty. Since then she had lived with her present husband for almost thirty years. She was the mother of many children with her second husband. We spoke to Mrs. Convert of the sinfulness of divorce and remarriage, and she wept tears of repentance. She asked, "What must I do? Tell me how to be right with the Lord."

On the basis of the present stand of the Christian Reformed Church I would have to tell this woman that she must leave her husband of thirty years to be right with the Lord. Our present stand is that a person "who has obtained an unbiblical divorce or who was divorced as a result of his own adultery, and — subsequently remarried — cannot during the lifetime of 'the former mate' be a member of the church unless in addition to confessing his guilt before the consistory, he manifests his genuine repentance, not only by means of a godly conduct in general but also and specifically by means of ceasing to live (in the ordinary marriage relationship) with his present spouse" (*Acts of Synod*, 1952, page 22).

The position we have taken rests upon the thesis that the second marriage is a continuous living in adultery. If this thesis be true, then repentance must be shown by a disruption of the second marriage. To be sure, it is drastic to ask a husband or wife to leave his or her present mate. Yet no church or consistory should hesitate to make such a demand if the Scripture clearly teaches its necessity.

Despite the fact that I may give this answer, I am haunted by a sense of uncertainty. I am not sure that Mrs.

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Our Penitence Problem — Continued

Convert is living in continual adultery; much less can I prove this to her. Indeed, our Synods have taken a stand, but there has not been conclusive substantiation from God's Word that will enable the office bearers to say without hesitation that penitence must be manifested by the rupture of marriage.

Does the Scripture clearly teach the thesis of continual adultery which underlies the stand of the Christian Reformed Church? A report to the Synod of 1952 by a study committee appointed to answer an appeal of Mr. P. Van Dyken stated, "Looking at Article 2 of the decision of 1947" (in which our present stand was formulated) "we deplore the fact that stronger exegetical proof for the thesis of 'continuous adultery' was not given. . . . It seems strikingly strange that our Synod adopted such a brief unargued statement of Scripture proofs. . . . The Van Dyken appeal calls attention to the fact that more adequate proof for Article 2 is sorely needed. Surely, the Church has no right to demand that persons leave their marriage partners without clear, complete, and convincing Biblical proof that this is what God demands." (Agenda 1952, p. 31)

Synod was very evidently in agreement with this report that more adequate proof was needed to substantiate its position. Consequently, Synod appointed a committee with a mandate "to examine the exegetical foundation for the thesis that the marriage of any person who has obtained an unbiblical divorce (or who was divorced as a result of his own adultery) is living in continual adultery" (*Acts of Synod*, 1952, p. 23). The kind of proof that Synod sought is indicated in a second mandate given to this committee. This mandate begins as follows: "If the committee's findings conclusively substantiate the position that a second marriage after unbiblical divorce is a living in continual adultery . . ." Synod thus made it clear that it sought exegetical materials that would *conclusively substantiate* the thesis of continual adultery.

If Mrs. Convert should come to me with her problem today, I would have to say, "To be right with the Lord and to be received into His Church you must leave your husband." I would have to add however: "The Christian Reformed Church is not quite sure that we have a right to make this demand. We think you are living in sin but our Synod has appointed a committee to furnish conclusive evidence of this fact."

At this time I look at the report of the Committee on Divorce appointed by the Synod of 1952. Perhaps it can help me to give an answer to Mrs. Convert. This report was before our Synods in 1954 and 1955 but consideration was postponed. It will be acted on in 1956. It is clearly an attempt to uphold the present stand of the Christian Reformed Church. The church ought to carefully consider whether the committee has given adequate grounds to warrant retaining its present stand.

* * *

LET US LOOK at the report of the Committee on Divorce. In its very first statement of Scriptural evidence the Committee of 1952 indicates that it is difficult to substantiate the thesis of continual adultery: "It should be evident to all that no text or texts can be found which directly and clearly support or refute the statement in question; i.e. that, unbiblical divorce and remarriage constitute a living in continual adultery. All the reams of material which have been written for, against, or about this thesis have failed to turn up one such text" (*Agenda* 1955, p. 118). Having so stated the committee insists "that the absence of a list of proof texts behind a statement of position does not necessarily indicate that the position is wrong." (*Ibid.*, p. 119). It, therefore, seeks to establish the thesis in question upon the basis of "cumulative and inferential argumentation." (*Ibid.*, p. 125). It is evident in the above statements and in the report as a whole that the committee is unable to furnish the church with the "conclusive substantiation" which Synod requested. Instead the committee protests that "the burden of proof rests on those who would contest this position." In other words, it seeks to maintain the present position of the church by reversing the mandate of the Synod of 1952. This is evading the direct charge of Synod that the committee must present findings to conclusively substantiate the position of continual adultery.

Although the Committee on Divorce admits that no single text conclusively proves the thesis of continuous adultery, it does refer to a few passages as pertinent to the problem. We note some of the argument of the committee with interest. The committee seeks to establish its contention on the basis of a key text, Matt. 19:3-9 and particularly verse 9. It contends on the basis of this text, "That the verb translated 'committeth adultery' leaves room for the construction that the adultery is continued or repeated. . . . It is not our purpose in saying this to indicate that continued action must be the case but simply that there is nothing in the grammar of this text (or of Matt. 5:32, Mark 10:11, 12 or Luke 16:18) to prohibit this possibility." (*Ibid.*, p. 120). At this point we muse that it will be a bit difficult to tell Mrs. Convert that she must separate from her husband because it is possible that she may be living in adultery.

But let us get back to the reasoning of the committee. It argues that *the adultery of which Christ spoke in Matthew* 19:9 *is the marriage*: "it is the marriage which is the committing of adultery . . . this is an adulterous marriage." (*Ibid.*, p. 120).

The argument at this point is not quite correct. The text of Matthew 19:9 states that two combined deeds — "putting away" and "marrying another" — constitute adultery. That both elements are involved is evident from the fact that Jesus calls the adultery here described a sin against the first wife (Mark 10:11), indicating that by the two acts a man completely breaches his first marriage. The second marriage is not adultery in itself but as a completion of the rupture begun in divorce. The Committee on Divorce takes an incorrect premise and so makes the logical error of the assumption of the consequent in its reasoning. The following syllogism elucidates the argument of the Committee on Divorce:

Jesus says, "the marriage is adultery."
Marriage is continual.
Therefore, the adultery is continual.

In reality, however, this syllogism is not correct. To be true to the text which speaks of two acts by which a man once for all ruptures the marriage bond, one must reason as follows:

Jesus says, "Divorce and remarriage is adultery."
Divorce and remarriage is not a continual act.
Therefore, Jesus does not say: "The adultery is a continual act."

Strangely, the Committee on Divorce

ter shifts its ground when it argues nd virtually claims that the adultery which Christ spoke in Matthew 19:9 the act of cohabitation. The Committee on Divorce states: "The crux the question involves the question hether the sinfulness of the marriage ontinues *after the initial act of cohabitation*" (*Ibid.*, p. 120 — Italics ours). he argument which the Committee on ivorce adduces to prove the thesis of ontinual adultery is that *the initial x act* of the new marriage *is adultery* nd therefore *succeeding sex acts are dultery*. In this manner a conclusion reached to uphold the present posion of our denomination: namely, that e sin to be repented of is the sin of e sex act within the second marriage. hus, the penitent must manifest "his enuine repentance . . . specifically by eans of ceasing to live (in the ordiary marriage relationship) with his resent spouse." (*Acts of Synod* 1952, rt. 84, page 22). This position of ynod and of the Committee on Divorce sts upon the assumption that the sin adultery in Matthew 19:9 consists nly in the act or successive acts of habitation. If the entire marriage is dulterous as the Committee on Divorce rst argues, then the conclusion follows that the sin to be confessed and rsaken is the entire marriage relaonship. Then we would have to tell rs. Convert that she must manifest enuine repentance by completely forking not only the ordinary marriage elationship but the entire marriage, t other words by obtaining another ivorce. This conclusion neither our ynods nor the Committee on Divorce ave ever adopted.

From the observations above, it appears the Committee on Divorce is conused about what constitutes the adultry in Matthew 19:9. At one time it ays it's the marriage; at another time, is cohabitation. We believe that he Ecumenical Committee of 1953 far more consistently interprets Jesus' statement in Matthew 19:9 — "He who diorces his marriage partner and maries another party, wilfully transgresses he holy commandment: Thou shalt not ommit adultery" (*Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod*, 1953, page 92). In ther words, in Matthew 19:9 *Jesus escribes a particular type of transression of the seventh commandment* — "*a combined deed of complete reach of marriage*" (*Ibid.*, p. 92).

The committee also argues that the words of John the Baptist concerning Herod's relationship to Herodias has some bearing on the mandate since they indicate that Herod continued in sin *after* marrying Herodias. It should be pointed out that this case is not pertinent for at least two reasons. First, there is no proof in Scripture or elsewhere that either Herod or Herodias obtained a divorce. Secondly, exegetes are agreed that this marriage was incestuous. In view of these factors (possible bigamy and incest), it is difficult to ascertain just which sin John had in mind when he said, "It is not lawful for thee to have her."

The Committee on Divorce makes a great deal of the "general support of Scripture" for its position. It argues that God has established marriage as a holy ordinance and a life long relationship and that He forbids adultery in the form of divorce and remarriage. With these statements everyone will agree, but they do not touch the problem of penitence by establishing the thesis of continual adultery.

Surely, the exegetical material in the report to Synod does not give much help in advising Mrs. Convert. When I finish my reading I still have no clear Biblical evidence that she is living in continual adultery. In fact, I am now convinced that such evidence cannot be found, and I can better understand why our Reformed brethren in the Netherlands and the Committee of the Ecumenical Synod take a position quite contrary to that of our denomination.

* * *

HOWEVER, there is another part to the committee's report. Perhaps it will help. The second mandate which the Synod of 1952 gave to its committee (contingent upon conclusive substantiation of the position of continual adultery) was to study the question of whether there may be ethical involvements or circumstances which may demand that an unbiblically divorced and remarried person shall continue in the second marriage. In this connection the committee makes some interesting statements: "One could hardly expect that clear cut directives would be found for such things as 'ethical involvements' arising out of remarriage . . . The committee is in hearty agreement on the existence of these involvements and their difficult character . . ." The committee argues that Consistories must deal in mercy toward repentant sinners, but are limited by the revealed will of God. It seems that "there is no perfect solution to this problem" but the responsibility of dealing with the problem "lies squarely with those who have involved themselves in the sinful relationship and difficult position" (*Agenda* 1955, p. 125f.).

Here at least the committee seems to understand the plight of Mrs. Convert. At least I can now tell her that the committee heartily agrees that she is in a difficult situation with ethical involvements. Furthermore, I can tell her that it seems that there is no perfect solution to her problem since she is in a position where "separation seems to be 'ethically impossible.'" When I tell Mrs. Convert these things she will ask me, "What shall I do? What is the best solution possible?" Then I shall have to answer in the words of the committee, "The responsibility of dealing with social obligations or ethical involvements lies squarely with those who have involved themselves in the sinful relationship and difficult position" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

At this time Mrs. Convert will have another question. She will say, "But I don't know the way out. Are not the Church and its ministers the representatives of Christ? And is He not the compassionate Savior? Does He not show to all penitents the way of salvation? Whom shall I ask if not you? Is it not the duty of the Church to show sinners the way to Christ?" When Mrs. Convert asks these questions I shall have to say with the committee, "It is not out of keeping with the character of the Church of Christ to declare this fact"; namely, "that the responsibility lies squarely with yourself" (*Ibid.*, p. 126).

Now let us ask ourselves, Is the advice of this committee the kind of advice Christ would give? Remember how He forgave the woman taken in adultery and sent out the often divorced and remarried woman of Samaria as a witness of the Gospel. I do not believe that the Christian Reformed Church wants to speak in His name and tell Mrs. Convert, "You must show the penitence of your sin by breaking up your home, by getting another divorce, even though we cannot substantiate that you are living in continual adultery." Neither do we want to tell her in the name of Christ, "You got yourself into this; now you must find your own way out."

It is time for our church to recognize that we have no adequate Scriptural basis for our stand on the penitence problem. It is time that we have real Biblical advice for Mrs. Convert.

Growing Pains

by HOWARD B. SPAAN*

A HUMOROUS and clever play was given by the Class of 1935 at my high school alma mater. *Growing Pains* was the title. It was about a teen-age boy whose emergence as a lanky young man not only caused him to suffer from the physical pains of rapid growth, but especially the pains of social adjustment. Such pains can be annoying and distressing for a man who is not yet a man.

It appears the Christian Reformed Church is also suffering from a case of growing pains. Since growing up is a desirable experience, we are happy to have to face the problem. When growth causes a human body to reach certain proportions, larger size clothes become necessary. Sometimes the growing youth must adjust himself to the idea of new fashions to meet his need. The immature seem to have a way about them for wanting to wear the kind of fashions they have always worn. Perhaps our denomination faces the same problem. At least so it seems to me.

Statistics are often very helpful in establishing facts and trends. The first column below records the number of *new Classes organized* during the decennial period, while the second column indicates the *increase in number of members* for the period.

1857-1867	1 Classis	
	no membership figures available	
1867-1877	1 Classis	
	no membership figures available	
1877-1887	4 Classes	10,000 members (approximately)
1887-1897	2 Classes	31,000 members
1897-1907	2 Classes	15,000 members
1907-1917	3 Classes	23,000 members
1917-1927	2 Classes	14,000 members
1927-1937	0 Classes	12,000 members
(1 new Classis was organized during 1937)		
1937-1947	4 Classes	16,000 members
1947-1957	10 Classes	70,000 members

The last decennial figures represent a projection. Just now (prior to the 1956 *Yearbook*) the figure for new Classes stands at seven. I believe it reasonable to assume that among the five possible new Classes now being discussed, three should become reality in time to record for this decennial period. The first eight years of this period register an increase of 62,000 members. At the present rate of increase and reckoning with the slowdown in Canadian immigration, the increase should be about 8,000 for the remaining two years.

Such growth necessarily has its repercussions in the church. Since 1947 every Synod has had to consider proposals for revision of our ecclesiastical structure. Prior to 1947 such proposals were infrequent. Since 1947 each Synod has had not just one proposal to consider, but some Synods were called upon to consider as many as four, all of which result from growing pains.

THE 1950 Synod's decision to restudy the problem of particular synods was the most obvious attempt to face the growth problem. Although particular synods were proposed at six earlier Synods dating back to 1898, the matter had lain dormant for twenty-two years. The Synod of 1952 received the report of its study committee which enthusiastically recommended the organization of eight particular synods. Our growth now made their organization desirable and even necessary. So contended the study committee.

Earlier Synods had rejected the proposal on the grounds that there were too few churches which were too widely scattered. Inequitable representation, already a recognized problem, would be increased. The 1952 study committee argued that the gaps were being filled with many churches, making possible good groupings of Classes and congregations. An equitable representation on the denominational level could now be achieved on the basis of geography. As a member of the committee of pre-advice at the Synod of 1952 considering this recommendation, I believe it is fair to observe that our committee concluded the study committee presented a reasonable case for its position. Yet, it was agreed, our denomination had not grown to the proportions that our machinery had become seriously antiquated. Synod adopted the advice of the pre-advisory committee, "Although your committee foresees the possibility that the Christian Reformed Church may desire to move in the direction of particular synods eventually, our judgment is that the church is not yet ripe for immediate decision on this matter. We recommend therefore that the particular synod report be referred to the church for study."

The Synod of 1954 reviewed the particular synod proposal in the light of the studies and discussions which had taken place during the previous two years. The study committee had again proposed that Synod take the first step toward the realization of Articles 47, 48, and 49 of our Church Order, by declaring the time is now. Synod decided to take no further action at this time. For a seventh time the door was left open for this proposal at some future date.

As one seeks to analyze this most recent attempt to establish particular synods, one reaches the conclusion that there were basically two reasons behind the move. First, our size as a denomination, particularly in number of Classes, is beginning to create greater problems in the area which involves denominational representation. Moreover, geographic areas once organically united in a common interest have become divided by the creation of several Classes. For instance, the great plains area of our country with so many common interests in education and evangelization has been subdivided six times over. Something to be gained by mutually facing the challenge of that area has been lost. Mutual concern and interest exists largely via the delegate tables in Calvin College Chapel at an annual continental meeting. Particular synods would recapture the mutual approach to the common challenge of a specific geographic area with a common temperament. Second, this move is an attempt to decentralize our denominational governmental structure.

THE PROPOSAL to realign our mission structure might not appear to be a matter of growing pains. Actually it is. Our mission endeavor began very modestly and simply. In 187? the Reverend Tamme VandenBosch was sent to minister to the struggling church at Clam Union (now Vogel Center), Michigan. Mr. VandenBosch spent brief periods of time ministering to a number of such churches as well as ministering to groups of immigrants in scattered areas with a view to organizing them into churches. With the

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ception of this work the Synod of 1880 uthorized the formation of the Comissie voor Binnenlandsche Zending, rerunner to our present-day Home ission Committee. In 1884 the Synod structed every Classis to delegate the airman of its Classical Home Mission ommittee as a member of the denomiational committee. Heathen mission terest was channeled through this comittee until 1888, when the Synod auorized the formation of the Heiden ending Commissie. Church Help, the gency granting loans to churches with uilding programs, dates back to 1892.

One by one new activities came into istence as the denomination grew. me of these activities were assigned existing committees and others were signed to new committees. Today we te the panorama of missions includes e gathering of the Reformed disperon into churches, the establishment of urches out of overcrowded churches, angelization among our American eighbors, evangelization among Amerian minority groups as the Jews, Neroes, Chinese, and Indians, mission ork in Nigeria, Ceylon, Japan, Argenna, Brazil, and Formosa (remnant of ir greater work in China before the ays of Mao Tse-tung and Chou En-i). Add to these the related activities the agencies aiding needy churches ith building programs, aiding churchunable to support themselves with pplementary salary grants, ministerg to our servicemen and women, aidg displaced Europeans of Calvinistic ock to emigrate to America, directing utch immigrants to Canada to Chrisan Reformed communities, broadcastg the gospel over a national radio etwork plus a contemplated expansion ver a second network, and the printing f tracts. Apparently Classis Grand apids West was impressed with this delopment and growth to the extent she w fit to overture the Synod of 1951 reorganize these activities along more gical lines.

The study committee on mission relignment came to the Synod of 1953 ith a majority and a minority report. ontending that the distinction between vangelization and church extension is rincipial, the majority observed exellent studies in the area of Calvinistic vangelism have not been projected in field activity. So much time and ffort as well as priority must be given the growing list of activities entrusted the General Home Mission Committee, that it is impossible to concentrate on evangelization. Consequently the Home Mission Committee should be relieved of its activities bearing upon church extension and should be assigned only the task of evangelism which would include the Back to God Hour and its follow-up program. The minority held this distinction was too sharp. Church extension and evangelism comprise an organic whole, which could be destroyed if separated.

The majority position proposed that all home mission work strictly speaking should be made the responsibility of the Home Mission Committee. This would include all work "which addresses itself particularly to the evangelization of the unchurched and unbelieving in the whole of our American community." To the Mission Board would be entrusted the task of evangelizing pagan people. The majority proposed the creation of a third committee to be known as the denominational services committee "which provides for the spiritual and material needs of our own churches and members when needed, as well as for our brethren of the Reformed faith." In practice the work of aiding in the establishment of congregations out of over-populated churches, all facets pertaining to Canadian immigration including the establishment of new congregations, the allocating of grants to needy churches as salary supplements, the allocating of non-interest bearing loans to needy churches with building programs, as well as a few other services would be mandated to this committee. The minority position agreed that the division is logical, but it granted too much status to the "emergency" activities. It would encourage the emergeney activities to become permanent activities. Consequently this committee would begin to foster an even stronger paternalism within the denomination than already exists. The Synod of 1955 accepted the minority report.

Whether one embraces the majority or minority position, one must conclude that the whole study stems from the fact that the denomination has grown. The present governmental machinery in the minds of many is not able to successfully and effectively discharge the evangelization mandate of the church. Both the minority and majority positions recognize there is need for more "grass roots" activity. Their approaches to resolve the problem vary. Since the denomination continues to grow, the problem obviously will continue to be with us.

DUE TO AN ever-increasing number of business items plus their resultant complexity the Synod of 1936 decided to meet annually instead of biennially. By 1941 this practice had generated six overtures requesting a return to biennial Synods. A study committee report to the Synod of 1942 recommending the continuance of annual synodical meetings was accepted. Since that time the only proposal to change the status quo of our Synods appeared in 1947, when Classis Wisconsin proposed that the meeting time of Synod be changed from June to August or July. This would allow study committees more time to formulate their reports for the *Agenda*. The report of the study committee on particular synods in 1952, however, did recommend the return to biennial Synods in the event particular synods were established.

One is again able to read the handwriting on the wall. The increase of items of business plus their complexity is gradually lengthening synodical sessions. Using the methods employed by the study committee in 1941 for computing days, we have reached the point of extending the synodical sessions by three days for each of the last three Synods over the average length of sessions when annual Synods were first introduced. As far as I am able to ascertain, the Synod of 1952 set an all-time record in hours. Already one hears complaints that our Synods rush their business in order to attempt to meet a Saturday night deadline for adjournment. There is agitation that the examination of candidates be removed from the agenda of Synod in order to allow the delegates more precious time on other matters. Obviously we are not able to meet twice in one year, and it is not feasible to extend our sessions into three weeks. The solution provided by annual meetings will soon prove itself nil and void. Growth always brings more problems numerically as well as more complex ones.

Growth also gives rise to the problem of how many men shall be delegated to Synod. Originally every church sent delegates. The day came when each Classis was restricted to a certain number of delegates. By 1936 this number was reduced from six to

Growing Pains — Continued

four per Classis. The Synod of 1953 received an overture from the Neland Avenue Church in Grand Rapids to reduce the number of delegates per Classis to two. The overture was rejected, but I predict we shall hear more on this matter. Already Synod has reached the number of 96 official delegates. The Synod of 1957 could well seat 116 delegates plus the number of advisers from college and seminary, publication offices, home and foreign mission offices, and representatives from the various missionary conferences. Prospects for unwieldiness meet our eyes.

WITH THE increase in the number of Classes the size of the Home Mission Committee, the Board of Missions, and the Calvin Trustees increases. Add to this the trend to include more laymen on these boards, and it becomes apparent that size will soon be a problem in the denominational boards as well as the Synods.

Arising out of the request from the Calvin Alumni Council addressed to the Synod of 1947, the Synod ultimately created nine seats for laymen on the Calvin Board of Trustees. With the present 26 clergy members the total becomes 35 Board members. The Mission Boards seat less lay members, but from time to time overtures appear and reappear agitating for greater lay participation. It does not seem to appear this trend to include more laymen will be reversed. In fact a fourth denominational committee with a tremendous responsibility, the Back to God Hour Committee, is equally divided between clergy and laity. A fifth committee with increasing responsibilities and managing a sizable business empire, the Publication Committee, also recognizes the principle of parity between laity and clergy. The trend, unless reversed, is toward parity. This projected into the three Boards anticipates large and unwieldy memberships.

As the number of Classes increase, so the mathematical possibilities of change in Board memberships increase. When there were fourteen Classes, there was a greater possibility mathematically for a Board member to change pastorates within the bounds of a Classis. A change of pastorate to a congregation in another Classis in our system means the termination of office as a Board member. With twenty-six Classes and the possible addition of three more the possibility of terminating services as Board members becomes the greater. The only hope for stabilization is the present reduction in the number of calling churches. This phenomenon tends to make for fewer changes of pastorates. The following table, which indicates the number of ministerial changes within each of the Boards, is revealing:

Date	Missions	Home Missions	Calvin
1955:	6	6	6
1954:	10	6	10
1953:	10	11	11
1952:	8	5	5
1951:	5	5	3
1950:	7	6	10

With this development of lack of continuity in the Boards in mind, Classis Kalamazoo overtured the Synod of 1954 to study this problem. Synod replied by reminding the Classis that the new six-year rule pertaining to tenure of office explained the large turnover in personnel on the Boards. However, a closer scrutiny will reveal this to be untrue. Only in *one* board was there something like a casualty list due to the six-year rule and that for one year. Instead the pattern reflects the change of pastorates as being the underlying cause for the turnover. Strangely this Synod replied to Classis Kalamazoo that "the possibility of an increased lay membership on Boards could provide greater continuity," while the action immediately prior to this decision by the Synod rejected an overture to work in the direction of increasing the number of laymen on boards with parity as an ultimate goal. Classis Kalamazoo, noting this discrepancy, sent a protest to the Synod of 1955. This protest was rejected on the grounds that the present rules had not yet proven themselves. A factor in an overture from the Bethany Church of South Holland to the same Synod was overlooked. Bethany pointed out in its grounds for opposing the realignment of missions that the Home Mission Committee for the last several years has had a 30 per cent turnover in membership per year.

Classis Kalamazoo suggested to the Synod of 1955 at least two directions in which the church could move in order to resolve this problem. First, the unit of representation (now the Classis) could be broadened either via particular synods or via regional units representing more than one Classis. The Classis presented a plan whereby the latter could be arranged. Second, the possibility of employing local committees in various geographic areas and mandating them with the total endeavor of Calvin, Missions, and Home Missions, as is now in practice with the Publication Committee, Church Help Committee and the Back to God Hour Committee could be considered.

Once again the problem of the size of our Boards and the problem of continuity is directly the result of growing pains.

ONE COULD NOT well conclude this article without observing that the overtone in the growth problem is the struggle between the forces advocating centralization and decentralization. The larger the United States government became, the more more centralization became apparent. Of course, centralization principially is in the interest of efficiency. We shall not enter into the problem of whether the centralization of our government has made for a more efficient government. We shall leave such a debate to the Democratic and Republican candidates for national office during the heat of the summer and autumn months.

The problem of a central church government versus a decentralized church government constantly insists on rearing its head at nearly every turn in these four problems stemming from our growth. During the debate on particular synods in 1952 I was a member of a sub-committee to interview prominent leaders in the Reformed Church in America about the desirability of such synods. Their unanimous reply was to the effect that there was no need for particular synods in our church, but it was a useful tool in theirs in order to maintain balance between the liberal and conservative elements of their church (since liberalism and conservatism can be located broadly along geographic lines within their communion). Particular synods are not designed to decentralize the government of their church. Most of their major activities are directed from Fifth Avenue, New York City, and they accept this as an efficient handling of the matter. Our study committee proposed a setup which would place more responsibility on the local level. They viewed "boardism"

and "centralization" as being undesirable.

The main criticism directed against the realignment plan of missions was the probability of encouraging more "boardism" than already exists, particularly in the category of denominational services. The decentralization problem was not a myth in these discussions.

With the reduction in the number of delegates to Synod in 1936, it was concluded that more local participation would be possible by having annual Synods instead of biennial Synods. One of the grounds for rejecting the Neland Avenue overture in 1953 was, "It is a recognized principle of Reformed Polity that as many as possible attend the major ecclesiastical assemblies." Presumably the thrust is to bolster the belief that more delegates per Classis insure the principle of decentralization. Classis Kalamazoo's repeated overtures concerning continuity involves the desirability to decentralize.

That there has been a trend to centralize our activities is unmistakable. That centralization breeds a sense of not being part and parcel of the denomination is likewise evident. Oftentimes in the hinterlands of Ohio one hears the expression, "What is the use of saying anything? The voice of the denominational center decides matters anyway." It is not difficult to understand the extreme enthusiasm of the study committee for particular synods in 1952. They saw in their proposal an opportunity to bring denominational direction and decision nearer to their territory and placing their area more on a par with the major church center. The committee personnel at that time was located in an area where the problem was keenly experienced.

A phenomenon in recent Home Missions which has gained some momentum speaks the language of decentralization. I refer to the establishment of Classical Home Missions (Spokane, Lake City) and the establishment of the Minister of Evangelism posts (Whitinsville, Midland Park, Cleveland East). The administration of these activities excludes a central administration from Grand Rapids through a local consistory. History has proven that the pendulum has been swinging between a strictly central control and a strictly local control in Christian Reformed Missions. Very likely there is a proper blend of both, but thus far it has not been determined what the ingredients of the blend be.

There have been cries to remove some of our activities from the church center as a countermove to centralization. When the Back to God Hour Committee was given the legacy of a building in Chicago, the Synod at least temporarily stayed its move to build the enlarged publication center in Grand Rapids. It was decided at the next Synod that the Chicago property was not suitable for our total publication endeavor. Yet no further inquiry was made into the fact whether it might be desirable to have our publication center in Chicago or some other city. The same atmosphere of non-inquiry likely will prevail relative to the site of the new seminary property. Yet the denomination goes on talking about the problem, but like the weather, never doing anything about it. So far no committee outside the particular synod committee has directly struggled with the problem of "boardism" and "centralization."

I believe I am not overstating the proposition when I observe that the struggle over this problem reaches its apex in the statement, "Is the price for efficiency too great?" That is a good question, to be sure. However, there is infinitely more involved. What is germane to Presbyterian polity on this score? Or more pointedly, what is Scriptural? I have inclinations and leanings, but I have no plan for solution.

* * *

I HOPE this article will promote a general interest in the problem stemming from growing pains. It strikes me that up till now we have been going at this problem piece meal. The reason we find no solution is that the proposal to create larger boots for the man still leaves him with an undersize hat. What Synod needs is a comprehensive look and study into the whole matter, including the centralization-decentralization problem. And parenthetically, it might be wise to postpone future building programs and include them in the study, for they are very much a part of the picture. As I view the problem of Christian Reformed growing pains, I am reminded of the three blind men who each described their impressions of an elephant. The elephant was described, you will recall, as being a trunk, a leg, or a tail. I am convinced we have been struggling annually at Synods since 1947 with a series of problems all of which stem from growing pains. What we need is a designer who will design a complete new suit which will fit the whole body. And that, I am very sure, requires much careful, painstaking study. I should like to enter a plea for such a study. Since the problem is so tremendous, it also demands a personnel representing various sections of our denomination, including the Canadian perspective as well as the American outpost perspective.

Church and Current Social Trends

by DONALD H. BOUMA*

IN THIS atomic age when conversation and concern are apt to be monopolized by problems of nuclear fission, global war, automation, and the like, we are in danger of disregarding the important sociological changes which probably have a greater, though less dramatic, impact on our lives. The study of these changes is the province of the sociologist. It is the challenge of the Christian sociologist to be informed as to the extent and direction of these changes, but particularly to understand and evaluate them in terms of God's revelation in Scripture. Then it is his responsibility to communicate to the church and its leaders the nature of these changes so that a joint approach can be made to finding the Christian answer for the problems of our changing culture.

There are four aspects of our changing social scene to which I shall call attention. Each of these is a topic in itself and hence the treatment of them can only be brief and suggestive.

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THE FIRST of these is the fact of urbanization, and its twin, suburbani-

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zation. This pronounced trend in American life has significant implications, since urbanism is more than a statistic. It is a way of life, and one sharply differentiated from the rural way.

Whereas in 1900 only 40 per cent of the United States population was urban, in 1950 the figure had risen to 65 per cent. Although 35 per cent was classified as rural, the rural *farm* group was only 15 per cent of the total. In 1870 over 50 per cent of our population was gainfully employed in agriculture; today the proportion has dropped to about 10 per cent.

Not only has the percentage of people living in cities increased. There has also been a marked increase in the numbers of people living in large metropolitan clusters. Further, through changes in communication and transportation, and other factors, there has been an accelerated urbanization of the remaining rural population. Urban values and styles of life are rapidly being disseminated to the rural hinterlands.

These processes are not merely present-day manifestations. They have been going on for many decades and since they are rooted in basic social and agricultural changes, they are likely to continue some time into the future. Although the rate of these changes may decelerate, there is little possibility of reversals occurring.

One of the important results of this is the secularization of society. Religion seems to many to be less relevant to urban life. In rural areas one looks about him and sees God, or at least something beyond man; in cities one looks about him and sees man. In the farm community one plants and works the soil, but each growing thing is essentially a mystery which points to someone beyond man. There is a constant concern for the weather, uncontrolled by man. One sees nature and he is humbled and baffled. Man is a subordinate being.

On the other hand, in the urban community man sees man and the accomplishments of man. Amazing feats surround him, but back of these are men, essentially like himself. Growing things are there because some "man" put them there. The check is larger this week because the "man" at the plant asked me to work overtime, or the "man" gave me a raise or promotion. Man conquers space, man conquers time, man conquers the elements, men bring pleasure and men bring pain.

Churches, too, tend to fare badly in the hubbub of city life. In rural areas the church was one of only a few social institutions and was quite generally considered to be an important aspect of the community. In cities today the church is only one of many social institutions which compete for man's time, attention, and money.

There are other implications of urbanism. Some of them we can only wonder about. For example, do you suppose it has anything to do with a person's decision to enter the ministry? The Sociology department has just done a small study of all of the graduates of Calvin seminary in the decade 1930 to 1940. Of the 96 ministers contacted through questionnaires only 6 failed to respond. These are some of the findings. About 35 per cent of the group came from village or open-country churches, but 75 per cent of them served village or country churches as their first charge. Fourteen per cent were sons of ministers, but there was no son of a doctor, a dentist, or a lawyer, and only one son of a teacher in the group. Almost 30 per cent were sons of farmers, although only about 20 per cent of our population was farming at the time. Although 70 per cent of all students at Calvin came from Michigan at that time, only 40 per cent of the ministers came from Michigan. Although 50 per cent of all students came from Grand Rapids, only 22 per cent of the ministers came from this city.

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THE SECOND aspect of our changing culture is mobility. It is vitally intertwined with urbanization, but it is so important that I have singled it out for special mention. There has been a large increase in horizontal, or geographical, mobility in our society. Along with mobility inevitably comes anonymity, and with anonymity inevitably comes a breakdown of informal social control.

All indices point to a marked increase in the amount of mobility. In any given year some 20 per cent of the American population moves out of the home in which they are living into another. TIME magazine's recent study of college graduates showed that 44 per cent of college graduates moved to new states after graduation, and that 25 per cent of the graduates went to entirely different sections of the country.

Lest anyone think that this situation does not prevail among us, it may be noted that the addresses of between 25 per cent and 30 per cent of our Calvin alumni must be changed each year because of shifts in residence.

The reasons for this mobility are based so deeply in the system which is ours, particularly the economic system, that one cannot hope that they will be easily reversed, or that this is a temporary situation. The sprawled-out character of American industry, for example, demands a highly mobile core of unskilled workers, as well as a mobile upper echelon of executives, whose vertical mobility in the hierarchy depends partly on their horizontal mobility. Many other factors are also involved in this mobility, including improved transportation possibilities, the passing of the family homestead, apartmentalized living, and small family size. All indications are that we will have more, not less, of this kind of mobility in the future.

Mobility leads to anonymity. The more people move around the less well known they are. Roots do not go down deeply. Neighbors become strangers, and strangers become neighbors. It is a lonely crowd. Physical contacts are many and close, but social contacts are brief and superficial. Urban living becomes a peculiar combination of lack of neighborliness and lack of privacy. Because our contacts are casual we depend upon conspicuous consumption to get the cues as to the assessment we should make of the people whom we meet.

Our further concern, however, is that this mobility-anonymity process weakens primary or informal control and places an impossible burden on secondary or formal controls. By secondary controls we simply mean laws, police, courts, and wardens. By primary control we mean the intimate supervision, without prerogative, that occurs in small groups. It is Mrs. Jones observing behavior behind the curtain and gossiping over the fence about it the next day. In all societies, even rigidly structured totalitarian systems, primary controls have been more effective in regulating the lives of indi-

viduals than the secondary controls of cops and courts. "Nobody knows me here," becomes the shibboleth of liberation from standards. This loss of effective social control, combined with an earlier as well as concomitant decline of religious controls through obedience to Divine Law, goes far to explain the anomic conditions prevailing in the country today. "In those days there was no judge in Israel, and every man did what was right in his own eyes."

Mobility raises other problems for the church. How does the church keep track of its mobile members? Many suspect that this is one reason why the Christian Reformed Church loses so many members each year. Even temporary mobility to college has created membership problems to which synod gave attention last year, but which are yet far from solution.

Problems of church and school location arise from mobility. What happens when the local congregation finds itself in a rapidly changing neighborhood? Does it stay where it is and minister to the new elements in the area? Does it stay where it is and minister to its own group which returns to the old area each Sunday for sentimental or other reasons? Or does it sell to the highest or most palatable bidder and relocate near its members?

How do we plan for new churches in suburban areas? Do we plan in advance as the Catholics have done, obtaining sites on the periphery of expanding cities when land is still available and at reasonable prices? Or do we continue on the kind of emergency basis which has characterized so much of our church expansion in the past?

* * *

A THIRD current trend is the changing role of the church itself. In the last several decades the church in the United States has become an inconsequential social institution. The stand of church groups on important social issues has through the years meant less and less to those who are in key positions of decision making. This is true even in a highly churched community such as Grand Rapids is.

A study of the significant ingredients of important decision-making processes reveals that the church groups are social clusters to be manipulated, rather than influential blocs to which one turns his ear to determine which course he should take. Neither the churches as institutions, nor members of churches as blocs of individuals, are crucially involved in the decision-making processes of most American communities. What the real estate board, the Chamber of Commerce, the CIO, or the newspapers will say about an issue is much more significant to decision makers than what church groups will say. Discussions of Christian social action will have to take this situation into consideration.

Regarding the role of the church in influencing important social issues in which it has an interest, I would like to refer to two interesting things which happened last spring in this state. One was the tremendous furor which was created amongst us about a relatively inconsequential nudist colony near Battle Creek. Everyone was urged to write Rep. Thomas Whinery, Chairman of the judiciary committee. *The Banner* reported that over 1,000 communications were received, some coming from as far as California. Several churches had petitions available for signatures after the Sunday services. This, in spite of the fact that Michigan already has a law which covers the problem involved.

The same month Michigan's legislature reduced the waiting period from 5 to 3 days for a marriage license because people were inconvenienced by having to wait so long and were pestering county clerks and probate judges for "emergency" exemptions. Many students of family life believe that one of the positive, constructive, things we can do to bolster marriage is to *increase* the waiting period, in order to give people a chance to change their minds before, rather than after, the wedding. For example, last year in Grand Rapids 9 divorces came three months after marriage, 22 six months after, 16 nine months later, and 12 more within the first year.

I contacted the Evangelical Ministers Union, to which group I had talked on divorce problems a few weeks earlier, which immediately wrote a Christian Reformed senator from this area. No reply. The bill passed the Senate. Next the Evangelical Ministers Union and I contacted the same Mr. Whinery and a Christian Reformed member of the House of Representatives, where the bill was then pending, indicating that we thought marriage was much too important a thing to be trifled with like that.

Result — the bill passed the house, too, amid a gush of sentimentality about giving cupid a break. The Associated Press reported that the only man to speak against the bill was Rep. Fitzpatrick, a Democrat from Detroit with a CIO constituency. He protested that "a five-day wait was not too long to consider the important step of marriage."

These two case histories indicate something about the role of the church in social action, providing illustrations of and probably reasons why the church has become so ineffective.

* * *

A fourth significant social trend involves the family and its members. Several things have been happening to the family in recent decades which I can only briefly mention.

In the first place, the sex composition of the family has changed radically. The United States is rapidly becoming a feminine nation. In 1930 there were 110 men for every 100 women. By 1950 this had dropped to 98 per 100, the first time in the history of the country that women had outnumbered men. By 1955 the figure had dropped to 94, and in cities it had dropped to 91. This is a direct result of the longer life expectancy of women and the decline in immigration since the 1920's, since the larger share of migrants were male. This is a trend that we can expect to continue.

Secondly, the large number of aged people in our population present a challenge to the church. Pastoral calls with aged members can be expected to occupy much of the time of the clergy. We have a fine tradition of caring for aged members in some of our larger church centers. Careful planning for this emerging problem must begin now.

Thirdly, the changing conception of marriage itself challenges the church to speak out with increasing vigor and clarity concerning the true meaning of marriage. Generally, in America marriage is considered to be a contract made at the pleasure of two individuals, to continue as long as the pleasure continues, to be broken on the agreement of both parties, or at the demand of one party with the payment of damages to the other.

As a result of this modern conception of marriage, divorce becomes an expected part of family life. Since 80 per cent of divorced people remarry within

two years, it is not marriage that is found to be unsatisfactory, only a particular marriage is. As a result we end up with a pattern of serial monogamy. It is true that divorce rates have tumbled each year since 1947. However, in some localities the rate has again started to turn upward. For example, while in the country as a whole there is one divorce for every 4.5 marriages, in Grand Rapids the rate is 1 in 3.4.

It is orthodox Christians alone who can call America back to a conception of marriage as a divinely ordained institution, symbolic of Christ's relationship to the church. What an opportunity there was to do just this when the marriage bill was being considered in the Michigan legislature recently.

Fourth, the family is undergoing change as the result of the employment of women, particularly of wives and mothers. One of the amazing post-war phenomena has been the gradually increasing percentage of women in the labor force, totaling in 1954 31 per cent. A study the Sociology department did in Grand Rapids indicated that 80 per cent of the women in the local labor force were married. Other studies indicate that 1 of 3 working women is the mother of a dependent child. Incidentally, in Grand Rapids, where about 35 per cent of the population is either Reformed or Christian Reformed, the percentage of working women is higher than the national average. I do not think we can dismiss this problem as one that affects only those outside of our circles.

Fifth, the methods of mate selection have changed. Romantic love has been increasingly emphasized in our culture. Parental advice and supervision have decreased. Our church has spoken frequently about the meaning of marriage and the sinfulness of unbiblical divorce, but much could be done in the matter of guidance in courtship. I fear that on this point we are fairly well "conformed to the world." I have often wondered what a missionary, faced with the problem of bride purchase in a foreign culture, would substitute for it and what his justification would be. Are we merely culturally consistent in this important matter of courtship, or are there Scriptural mandates which apply?

Finally, the American family has experienced a sharp decrease in the functions which it is expected to perform. One function has followed another out of the home to be taken over by other agencies, which agencies then often hire the mother out of the home to do many of the same things she formerly did in the home. As a result the American Family, 1955 edition, is a considerably different thing, both as to structure and function, than the American Family, 1925 edition. It can almost be said that the family has joined the trend toward specialization which is so characteristic of other organizations.

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THESE are four current social trends which the church must take note of as it faces squarely the issues of the day. Some of these will involve the instituted church directly. Others will involve the members of churches who look to the clergy for guidance from God's Word as to the basic direction through the changing circumstances of life.

The problems are large and complex. We will need to be intelligently aware of the nature, dimensions, and implications of the social trends which surround us. In this connection I would call your attention to the Reformed Sociological Institute, organized one year ago by members of our sister church in The Netherlands. It is under the direction of Dr. R. Van Dyke of the Free University. The aim is to do research in the field of social change as it affects the church and to plan for social action. For example, in the last year they have done a study for a Christian school board in The Hague on school relocation, a research on attitudes of youth in Zeeland, and a study of methods of care for old people. They publish a paper every three months which reports the findings and serves to keep the people informed in the areas of sociology and social work. From what I have learned of this movement, I think it shows considerable promise. We should watch it with great interest. We have done some of this kind of research at Calvin and we are constantly expanding our social welfare frontiers, but much more remains as a challenge before us.

Besides this intelligent awareness of social issues, we need to be diligent students of God's Word. Scripture is filled with mandates for the Christian in the field of social relationships. These we must better understand, and then have the courage to apply them in concrete situations. We all need each other as we strive to find the path God would have us take.

On the IUS Reformandi

by LEONARD VERDUIN

ALL REFORMED CHURCHES have had their troubles with Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, the article that assigns to the civil magistrate the duty of destroying all false religion and of underwriting the true.

One sometimes hears it said that this Article is a "sport" in the Reformed theology of the 16th century, a sort of relic of the middle ages, an item essentially out of place in the context in which it stands.

But the plain fact is that this sort of apology for Article 36 flies in the face of the facts; for as it stands the Article reflects the position anent the duty of the magistrate toward the cause of Christ that prevailed in the camp of the Reformers. They knew the other position, the one to which the Reformed churches have now come, knew it well, and — rejected it consciously.

This present article intends to give a bit of evidence that what we say is historical. We will have room for but a single strand of the evidence; but it will be a good sample.

In 1538, a quarter of a century before the Belgic Confession was written, the Strassburg Reformer, Martin Bucer, wrote a pamphlet entitled *Von der wahren Seelsorge*. In it he set forth the view, typical enough of the Reformers, that it is the duty of the civil rulers to reform the church.

The tract soon found its way to the

nds of the empire. It was read with vidity also by the Bohemian Brethren, hose interesting evangelicals of the reas to the north and east of Prague, vho owed a great deal to John Hus nd to the Waldensians. They liked Bucer's tract, liked it very much — ave for the section that saddles the ivil powers with the duty of eliminating heresy and advancing the true faith. With this they disagreed as emphatically s they agreed with the rest. They sked Bucer for permission to transate it and to print it in their naive Czech language — but with the ffending section deleted. The letter sking this permission was written by ohn Augusta who was one of the four nen who composed the Council of the Brethren. It therefore must be taken o reflect the official position of the group for which Augusta spoke.

* * *

BEFORE we quote from Augusta's etter we must supply a little background; certain facts must be known n order to assess matters correctly.

The Bohemian Brethren had at first ooked hopefully in the direction of Luther and his reformatory movement. And, for a while it looked as though hese two movements would find in each other the comfort and moral support hat both of them needed. But it soon became apparent that they and Luther did not see eye to eye after all. They were too much in the tradition of the pre-1517 reform movements, especially hat of the Waldensians, to make a happy marriage between the Lutherans and the Brethren possible. The Brethren had been too much influenced by such men as Peter Chelcicky and Lukas of Prague for that. The latter was deeply influenced by the ancient Waldensian traditions. When it became evident that Luther rejected unequivocally some of the things they held most dear the Bohemian Brethren turned to Bucer in the hope of finding in him a more congenial ally. Their correspondence with Bucer gives evidence of great willingness on their part to come to unanimity with the western reformers. This fact makes it all the more significant that in regard to the question of the duty of the magistrate toward the church they rebelled against Bucer.

Tensions between the two viewpoints had come to expression in other parts of the country. They had manifested themselves as soon as the Waldensians of the Piedmont had made overtures toward the Swiss reformers, seeking their friendship. It was at the Synod of Chanforan in 1532 (also known as the Synod of Angrogne) that the tensions came to an open break, when, under the by no means bashful coaching of Farel and Saunier (whom the Swiss reformers had sent to insure victory for the Reformed view) the majority of the Waldensian clergy capitulated to the views of the reformers. A minority, consisting largely of the older *barbe's* of the Waldensians, refused to surrender the older insights, and, walked out of the meeting. They went to Bohemia to cry on the shoulder of their brethren there.

Two of these older *barbe's*, Jean de Molines and Daniel de Valence, made it a point to visit the Strassburg reformers in a vain attempt to gain them over to the more ancient insight. While there they met Calvin and talked with him at length. Shortly afterward an official delegate from the Bohemian Brethren arrived at Strassburg, the youthful Matthew Czerwenka, who stayed 42 days and talked with the leaders of the reform movement there, including Calvin. Czerwenka informs us that one of the things they talked about during his lengthy discussion was the rift that had occurred at Chanforan. It was in connection with this Czerwenka that the western Reformers for the first time in their lives came face to face with a group that had recovered not only the evangelical truth but also church discipline according to the lines laid down in the New Testament. They gasped at what they learned from their visitor concerning the matter of discipline; and, acknowledged openly that in this matter the Bohemian Brethren were far ahead of them all. For in Bohemia they had a discipline along purely spiritual lines, one that ended, in the case of obduracy, in excommunication from the Brotherhood, but, without political sanctions of any kind, the kind of discipline that is possible only where separation of church and state is in vogue. Czerwenka was not slow in pointing out that discipline cannot be restored to its New Testament lines unless recourse to "the secular arm" is repudiated. The Strassburg theologians granted that Czerwenka's position was hard to overthrow with argument drawn from Scripture; but they stuck to their guns nevertheless.

We have given this historic data in order to show that the position taken in Article 36 was deliberately taken, and, that it was an issue long before the Belgic Confession was composed, and, that the position to which we of the 20th century have now come was by no means unknown or undefended in the days in which Article 36 was taking shape.

* * *

NOW FOR John Augusta's letter, to Bucer. After saying a lot of fine things about Bucer's tract Augusta comes to the point, saying, of the reformation of the church "This work of the Lord will be done without the help of the sword and without show of brute force, merely by the spiritual power and by grace. . . . The Scriptures do not teach that the powerful ones must build the church with the help of force and coercions. Men who have both power and faith must themselves be subject to the discipline of God as well as any other members of the church. . . . For the civil authorities have not been called by God to remove the tares by persecuting or by confiscations or by depriving men of their lives for reasons of faith and of religion. It is not for such ends that God has given them power; to the contrary, Christ has forbidden the use of force within the church. It is the rulers' business to administer impartially and equitably the temporal affairs, material and earthly things, and, to spread peace among all their subjects, whether they are believers or no. In this way they will be rendering a faithful service to God. It is unworthy for those who love the Word of God in truth to constrain to the faith by a tyrannical violence those who are as yet outside, or, to preserve their fellow-believers in the faith contrary to their own volition, even as it is uncalled for to force a man to be present at the communion table in a vain effort to get from him a willing acceptance of the faith. The secular authorities have neither the power to appoint ministers nor the authority to expel them; it is not their assignment to introduce a divine service as they think it should be, nor, to forbid one that pleases them not. To do so is to go contrary to the example and precept of Christ, contrary to the primitive

church of the Apostles, contrary to the law of grace, the law of grace that does not ask for servants by constraint and contrary to their wishes but, to the contrary, leaves to every man his freedom to choose. . . . The Savior has given no other means nor any other rule to constrain men to religion and to the faith than the Word of truth alone, the reception into the church or the expulsion out of the church, without any recourse to the temporal powers, and, with the rejection of all reprisals, either in honor, goods, or life. The civil power is insufficient for the building of the kingdom of Christ. . . . For that a higher power is needed and a more perfect. And for this, surely, Christ our King, the Lord of the spirit, is sufficient, with the help of the power of the Holy Spirit and His revealed Word, without any help from the temporal power. . . . We do not read anywhere in the discourses of Christ and of his Apostles that they waited for the help of the princes, the kings, and the lords. For this reason we have not the slightest reason to wait, in these latter times so full of difficulties, for a renewal, a reform, a reconstruction of the church by the sword of the temporal power. . . . It is not to those to whom the physical sword has been committed that the Lord has said 'Constrain them to come in.' By what means, pray? Certainly not by the sword of iron; but, by that of the divine Word, which has been given for the willing subjection of human souls to God, by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is these that have organized, built, protected the church, and, without recourse to violence. . . . Oh God, what evils have not been committed by constraining men to religion by the sword! Have we forgotten the word of the Lord, that they who take the sword shall perish by the sword? Let us not point then with this blade, lest it turn upon us or upon our children in punishment for our own errors. The papists have given themselves with insolence to the propagation of the faith by means of the sword, in disregard of the will of God and of His revealed Word; for their church has abandoned the spiritual power, namely the Word, pure and powerful, that penetrates into the deepest recesses of the soul. It is for its grave errors that it is being punished by God and she knows only how to defend her own errors with the sword. If she would renounce violence in dealing with men. . . . if she left to every man to be touched by the power of God without coercions . . . then the Gospel, that joyous good tidings, would at last gain free course, the kingdom of Christ would be built and the tyranny of Antichrist would be destroyed.

. . . We seek therefore that among us everything shall be done as in the primitive church, which maintained itself perfectly without the help of the worldly rulers. . . . Each member of the body of the church who becomes ill or becomes an occasion for stumbling, ought, in the name of the power of Christ, to be made whole by a discipline that is of its own kind and that differs from the discipline of the temporal power. An incurable member and one that is likely to spoil the others, must be cut off and excluded, no matter if it be a king, a prince, or a lord, a clergyman or a peasant. . . . This power, we repeat, suffices for the health and the administration of the church, without recourse to the secular arm which the ministers are not permitted to employ for the weeding out of the tares. For Christ wishes to reign and conquer men by the faith, not by any earthly power, but by that of the Spirit and the Word. And this is as true now as it was in the first days of the church, yes, will be to the end. . . . They say that this is to bring into being a sect — but it was Christ's mission to do just that."

* * *

HAVING said all this Augusta again becomes conciliatory — for the Bohemian Brethren were very eager to have a friend — saying, "Your tract pleases us highly because it is based solidly upon the Scriptures — if we except the passage that affirms the need of constraint in that which concerns the Christian faith. In this subject you take recourse to imperial law and the views of Augustine. This, it is true, you seek to excuse. But we are convinced that such constraint will bring the church more of evil than of good."

And what did Bucer say? He said, "I am persuaded nevertheless that there is no reason why the magistrates in the exercise of their authority . . . have not the right to punish those who publicly speak evil of the Christian faith. . . . The God of long ago is the same as the God of our times, and they who transgress God's Law should be subjected to the Law, today as then. . . . The magistrate does not bear the sword in vain. . . . And so the magistrates are to protect religion against the blasphemers. . . . Just as is the duty of a father in a Christian family so is the duty of a father of the fatherland or of a Lord in a city; it is his duty to separate those who rebel against Christ from the rest. This divine ordinance is one of extreme usefulness as long as the world stands. It is our conviction that among you also it is the duty of the magistrate to set himself against every evil work, principally against those that turn upside down the way of the Lord and that are detrimental to the true religion." Somewhat later Bucer wrote, in another connection, that "Whereas devout rulers are called to advance the Kingdom of Christ with the sword also, therefore it is part of their duty not to tolerate those who openly oppose the sound doctrine. . . . The notion that this takes place because such a man threatens the civil peace and is seditious is not enough; for that man also is not to be put up with who refuses to be instructed in the Christian faith (ferri in republica Christiana non debet, qui doceri se, quae regni Christi sunt, non sustineat)."

The reader will have recognized in Bucer's views the same position that is taken in Article 36. And, he will have recognized in the delineations of Augusta the position taken in our own country. The doctrine so fervently confessed by the Bohemian Brethren has come to be the accepted thing in America; and the views of Bucer are by the First Amendment declared to be illegal. No person can subscribe to Article 36 as it has come down to us and honestly take the oath of office required of the President of the United States.

The view so ably defended by the Brethren has come to be the accepted thing with us, but, by a long and tortuous way. The views of the Reformers lingered on for a long time. One finds traces of it in our European brethren to this day. This too we wish to document a bit.

* * *

AS LATE as 1554 Theodor Beza, Calvin's successor at Geneva, wrote, in

is lengthy defence of the Servetus laying: "What crime can be greater r more heinous than heresy that sets t nought the Word of God? Christian nagistrates, do your duty toward the God who has put the sword in your ands for the honor of His majesty; trike down valiantly these monsters in he guise of men!" What kind of monters? Men who demanded freedom of he conscience, who in asking for this vere, according to Beza, demanding omething "Worse than the tyranny of he pope; for it is better to have a tyant, no matter how cruel, than to let veryone do as he pleases." He considred the idea of more than one religion n a land, all equally legitimate before he law, to be a "*dogma diabolicum.*"

Johannes Bogerman, whom the Reormed Churches honored with the presidency of the Great Synod wrote, in 611, when some were suggesting that he civil ruler ought to keep aloof from he gathering storm over Arminianism, hat they deserved a stern rebuke seeng that "nothing is so necessary and erviceable toward civic health and the bviation of turmoil as is the practice f one and the same religion, seeing that o bond of unity or fidelity can exist mong men who are committed to varius religions." It was a consequence f this "Reformed" insight that the Remonstrants were banished from the and. If we were to act on this inight today we should be clamoring for he expulsion of at least 99 per cent f all the people living in the United States today!

It is highly significant that the Reormed Churches of The Netherlands ived with Article 36 in perfect comosure until comparatively recent times. t was not until a Free Church born of he Secessions (such as that of the Bohemian Brethren) had been achieved hat people in the Reformed tradition n Holland began to feel less than comortable in the presence of Article 36. Happily they were Protestant enough hen to do something about this creedal tem, so thoroughly medieval in its outook.

One still finds traces of this objectionable notion that Bucer, and with him the other Reformers, defended so rigorously; it has not yet dawned on ome, whose eyes were otherwise inclined to be quite open, that coercion s in itself a violation of the law of Christ — as the Bohemian Brethren put it — and that voluntarism is of the very nature of the Gospel. Some of the deliverances of the great Abraham Kuyper are quite inadequate, according to American taste. He said repeatedly that "if coercion by the secular powers worked then we would not for one moment hesitate to employ it" (*Baatte staatsdwang, we zouden geen oogenblik voor staatsbemoeiing . . . terugdeinzen*). All Dr. Kuyper's eloquent assertion that history had shown coercion to be ineffective fails to satisfy; for at any time a man can stand up to declare that with modern techniques of social controls it *will* work, and then we would have all the terror of the Inquisition back upon us. Kuyper seems to have been sufficiently medieval still so as not to realize, as did Augusta and his people, that coercion is contrary to the law of Christ.

LETTERS TO THE JOURNAL

The Editors
The Reformed Journal

Sirs:

I enjoyed the fine article of Rev. Bossenbroek: "Reluctantly Endured." The article is sure a step in the right direction. Rev. Bossenbroek points out in observation three: If in the early church those "living in continual adultery" could be members of the church, the same is true today. If that basis was all right in apostolic times, it certainly will be in the framework of our times, with social and economic circumstances so much different. Repentance (berouw-bekeering) for past sins opens fully the way to restoration into church membership and fellowship. In our Mission chapel work we meet families who committed *wilful adultery* (italics are mine). They repented of their sins. After years of living a pure second marriage life, they cannot go back to their first proper mates. If our church keeps on holding to the unproved scriptural idea that they still live in "continual adultery," then after repentance it becomes a *non-wilful adultery* and such Christ, who looks at the motives of the heart, will except. Standards of the church may not be a barrier to refuse the full restoration. I do not like Calvin's expression too well. Not "reluctantly," as if we are not too sure of the course we take, lukewarm to take them back to the full communion with the people of God. No, accept those brothers and sisters after repentance wholeheartedly, forgive, and most of all forget.

Morris Zwiep

Grand Rapids, Mich.

We . . . are accused of being useless in the affairs of life. How in all the world can that be the case with people who are living among you, eating the same food, wearing the same attire, having the same habits, under the same necessities of existence? We are not Indian Brahmins or Gymnosophists, who dwell in woods and exile themselves from ordinary human life.

We do not forget the debt of gratitude we owe to God, our Lord and Creator; we reject no creature of His hands, though certainly we exercise restraint upon ourselves, lest of any gift of His we make an immoderate or sinful use.

So we sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your traffickings — even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit.

—Tertullian, *Apology* 42.

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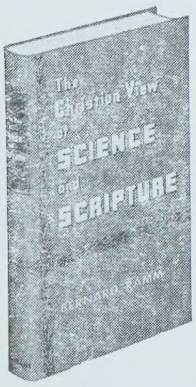

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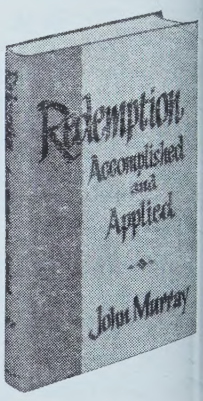

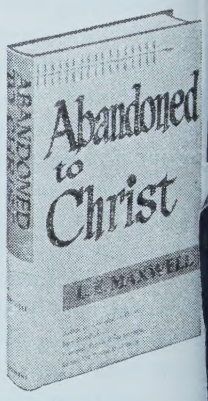

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